



The Holy See

THE HOLY FATHER'S MESSAGE FOR WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2001

Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo (Ps 89[88],2) [I will sing the mercies of the Lord forever].

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. With intimate joy we celebrated the Great Jubilee of salvation, a time of grace for the whole Church. Divine mercy, experienced by each of the faithful, prompts us to "put into the deep", remembering with gratitude the past, living with passion the present and looking forward with confidence to the future, convinced that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever" (Heb 13,8) (cf. Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 1). This tending towards the future, illuminated by hope, must be the basis of all Church activity in the new millennium. This is the message that I wish to address to every Catholic on the occasion of Mission Sunday, which will be celebrated on 21 October.

2. It is time, indeed, to look forward, keeping our eyes set on the face of Jesus (cf. Heb. 12,2). The Spirit calls us to "direct our thoughts to the future which lies before us" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 3), to witness and to proclaim Christ, giving thanks "for the 'marvels' the Lord has worked for us: '*Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo*' (Ps 89,2)" (*ibid.*, n. 2). On the occasion of Mission Sunday last year, I reminded you that missionary commitment is born of ardent contemplation of Jesus. A Christian who has contemplated Jesus Christ cannot fail to be captivated by his radiance (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 14) and to commit himself to bearing witness to his faith in Christ, the only Saviour of mankind.

Contemplation of the face of the Lord leads the disciples to contemplate the faces of the men and women of today: the Lord identifies himself in fact with "the least of my brothers" (cf. Mt 25,40.45). Contemplation of Jesus "the first and greatest evangelizer" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 7) transforms us into evangelizers. It makes us aware of his desire to give eternal life to those entrusted to him by the Father (cf. Jn 17,2). God wants "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2,4) and Jesus knew that the Father's will for him was that he should announce the Kingdom of God to other towns: "for I was sent for this purpose" (Lk 4,43).

The fruit of contemplating the "least of his brothers" is the discovery that every person, although in a way which is mysterious for us, is in search of God, by whom he or she is created and loved. His first disciples discovered this: "[Lord], everyone is searching for you" (Mk 1,37). And the "Greeks", on behalf of future generations, exclaim: "We wish to see

Jesus" (Jn 12,21). Yes, Christ is the true light that illuminates every person who comes into this world (cf. Jn 1,9): mankind searches for him, "feeling after him" (Acts 17,27), drawn by an inner attraction the origin of which they themselves do not know. It is hidden in the heart of God, where there beats a desire for universal salvation. Of this, God makes us witnesses and heralds. For this purpose he fills us, like in a new Pentecost, with the fire of his Spirit, with his love and with his presence: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28,20).

3. Another fruit of the Great Jubilee is the attitude that the Lord asks of every Christian, to look ahead with faith and with hope. The Lord does us the honour of placing his confidence in us and calling us to the ministry, showing us his mercy (cf. I Tm 1,12.13). This call is not reserved for a few, it is for everyone, each in his own state of life. In the Apostolic letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* I wrote in this regard: "This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of 'specialists' but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as *the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups*.... Christ must be presented to all people with confidence. We shall address adults, families, young people, children, without ever hiding the most radical demands of the Gospel message, but taking into account each person's needs in regard to their sensitivity and language, after the example of Paul who declared: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Cor 9,22)" (n. 40).

The call to mission acquires a singular urgency, particularly if we look at that part of humanity which still does not know Christ or recognize him. Yes, brothers and sisters, mission *ad gentes* is today more than ever valid. I hold impressed on my heart the face of humanity that I have been able to contemplate during my pilgrimages: this is the face of Christ reflected in that of the poor and the suffering; the face of Christ mirrored in those who live like "sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6,34). Every man and woman has the right to be taught "many things" (*ibid.*).

Faced with the evidence of human fragility and insufficiency, the human temptation, for the apostle too, is to send people away. Instead, it is at this very moment that, contemplating the face of the Beloved, each of us must listen again to the words of Jesus: "There is no need for them to disperse.

Give them something to eat yourselves" (cf. Mt 14,16; Mk 6,37). In this way we will experience at the same time both human weakness and the Lord's grace. Aware of the inevitable fragility which marks us profoundly, we feel the need to render thanks to God for what he has done in us and for all that, in his grace, he will still do.

4. How can we fail to recall, in these circumstances, all the missionaries, priests, religious and laity who have made mission *ad gentes* and *ad vitam* their reason for living? With their very life they proclaim "without end the graces of the Lord" (Ps 89). Not rarely this "without end" has come to the point of bloodshed: how numerous were the "witnesses to the faith" in the last century! It is also thanks to their generous giving of self that the Kingdom of God was able to grow. To them goes our grateful remembrance, accompanied by our prayer. Their example gives stimulus and support to all the faithful who can take courage seeing themselves "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12,1) who with their deeds and words made and continue to make the Gospel resound on every continent.

Yes, brothers and sisters, we cannot remain silent about what we have seen and heard (cf. Acts 4,20). We have seen the

work of the Spirit and the glory of God show themselves in weakness (cf. II Cor 12; I Cor 1). Still today numerous men and women with their dedication and their sacrifice are for us eloquent manifestations of God's love. From them we receive the faith and we, in turn, are urged on to be announcers and witnesses of the Mystery.

5. Mission is "*the joyful proclamation of a gift* meant for all, and to be offered to all with the greatest respect for the freedom of each one: the gift of the revelation of the God who is Love, the God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son' (Jn 3,16).... The Church therefore cannot forgo her missionary activity among the peoples of the world. It is the primary task of the *missio ad gentes* to announce that it is in Christ, 'the Way, and the Truth, and the Life' (Jn 14,6), that people find salvation" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 56). This is an invitation to all, it is an urgent call that deserves an immediate and generous answer. We must set out! We must set out without delay, like Mary, the Mother of Jesus; like the shepherds, stirred by the first announcement of the Angel; like Mary Magdalene at the sight of the Risen Lord. "At the beginning of this new century, our steps must quicken as we travel the highways of the world.... The Risen Christ asks us to meet him as it were once more in the Upper Room where, on the evening of 'the first day of the week' (Jn 20,19) he appeared to his disciples in order to 'breathe' on them his life-giving Spirit and launch them on the great adventure of proclaiming the Gospel" (*ibid.*, n. 58).

6. Dear brothers and sisters! Mission demands prayer and concrete commitment. Many are the needs for a capillary diffusion of the Gospel.

This year is the 75th anniversary of the institution of Mission Sunday by Pope Pius XI, who accepted a request by the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith to "establish 'a day of prayer and propaganda for the missions' to be celebrated on the same day in every diocese, parish and institute of the Catholic world ... and to encourage offerings for the missions" (Sacred Congregation of Rites: *Institution of Mission Sunday*, 14 April 1926. AAS 19 (1927), p. 23 ff.). Since then Mission Sunday has been a special occasion to remind the whole People of God of the permanent validity of the missionary mandate, since "missionary activity is a matter for all Christians, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations" (Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 2). It is at the same time an opportune circumstance to reaffirm that "the missions ask not only for a contribution but for a sharing in the work of preaching and charity towards the poor. All that we have received from God life itself as well as material goods does not belong to us" (*ibid.*, n. 81). This Day is important in the life of the Church "because it teaches how to give: as an offering made to God in the Eucharistic celebration and for all the missions of the world" (*ibid.*). May this anniversary be then an opportune occasion to reflect on the need for greater, common effort to promote the missionary spirit and collect the necessary material aid which missionaries need.

7. In the homily for the closing of the Great Jubilee, on 6 January 2001, I said: "We need to set out anew from Christ with the zeal of Pentecost, with renewed enthusiasm. To set out from him above all in a daily commitment to holiness, with an attitude of prayer and listening to his word. To set out from him in order to testify to his Love" (n. 8).

Therefore:

Set out anew from Christ, you who have found mercy.

Set out anew from Christ, you who have forgiven and been forgiven.

Set out anew from Christ, you who have known pain and suffering.

Set out anew from Christ, you who are tempted by tepidity: the year of grace is endless.

Set out anew from Christ, Church of the new millennium.

Sing as you go! (cf. *Closing rite of the Mass of the Epiphany of the Lord 2001*).

May Mary, Mother of the Church, Star of Evangelization, accompany us on our journey, as she remained with the disciples on the day of Pentecost. To her we turn with confidence. Through her intercession may the Lord grant us the gift of perseverance in our missionary duty, which is a matter for the entire Church community.

With these sentiments I bless you.

From the Vatican, 3 June 2001, Solemnity of Pentecost.

JOHN PAUL II